

A visitor to a community along our Southern Border quickly learns that the people in this region desire the same things as other American communities: safety and security, and a prosperous economy that provides good paying jobs and generates the revenue to support public services such as schools, transportation, and infrastructure. These communities are unique, however, in that because of their location, both their security and prosperity depend to a large degree on the federal government's policies and programs relating to the border. This has been the case for many decades, with illegal immigration and narcotics smuggling emerging as national concerns.

But never has the linkage between our border communities and national security been greater than since the 9/11 attacks. For now, our national security depends on our ability to prevent terrorists planning catastrophic acts of violence against the American people from crossing the Southern Border. We cannot, however, in the name of security, hinder the vibrant economic activity that passes through our border every day. To meet these dual goals of security and prosperity, we need a dramatically new approach to the Southern Border. And the time to do this is now – our terrorist enemies will not wait, neither can we.

In February, 2004, I visited Laredo, Texas at the invitation of Laredo Mayor Betty Flores to meet with South Texas government, civic, and industry leaders to discuss the issues facing border communities. These discussions, along with meetings with federal and state officials charged with implementing federal border programs, highlighted the immense challenge of attempting to enhance security without stifling economic growth.

These meetings also convinced me of the need for a comprehensive investigation of the Southern Border to inform congressional deliberations on border and homeland security policies, budgets, and programs. I tasked the Minority staff of the Select Committee to conduct this investigation. On five separate fact-finding trips, my staff visited 24 of the 43 crossing points on the Southern Border and inspected hundreds of miles of border territory between official points of entry.¹ During the course of this travel, staff interviewed hundreds of current and recently retired Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employees, received briefings from virtually all the federal agencies with responsibilities for border security, and met with scores of subject matter experts. These trips also offered the opportunity to listen to the concerns and recommendations of city and state officials, community leaders, union officials, business leaders, trade groups, and others – all of whom have been directly impacted by federal border control policies and procedures.

¹ The trips included Laredo, Texas (March 8-11, 2004), El Paso and Presidio, Texas (March 28 – April 2, 2004), Tucson, Lukeville, Sasabe, Nogales and Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation, Arizona (April 26- 30, 2004), McAllen, Brownsville and Corpus Christi, Texas (June 6-10, 2004), and San Diego, San Ysidro and Otay Mesa, California (June 28 – July 1, 2004). Members of the Majority staff of the Select Committee also attended a number of these trips.

The conclusions of this report are stark and disturbing. We have very major security gaps on our Southern Border that are not being addressed. Just last week, I visited Brownsville and Harlingen and learned that thousands of illegal immigrants, from countries other than Mexico, are coming across the border, being arrested by the Border Patrol and then being released into the community because we have no available detention space. We have places on our border where there is nothing – no fencing, no electronic monitoring, and no effective law enforcement presence – to stop people from coming across the border. Our ports-of-entry are so congested, that at times, cars are just waived through the border, with hardly any inspection. All of these security gaps could provide the pathway for a terrorist to enter the United States and do grave harm. This country is fighting a war against terror, but nowhere is the gap between rhetoric and reality greater than on our Southern Border.

To provide the security, while enabling continued economic growth and prosperity, we need a genuine transformation of the Southern Border. The decades of neglect must end. The recommendations contained in this report represent the greatest investment in our Southern Border in history. I am calling for creation of a \$1 billion infrastructure investment fund, deployment of technology to monitor the entire border 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and a doubling of border patrols and inspectors, as well as increasing the detention space and the judicial and prosecutorial services needed to support these law enforcement efforts. Nothing short of this across-the-board transformation will meet the security and economic demands of the 21st century.

There can be no doubt that the findings of this report also demonstrate the need for an honest, nonpartisan dialogue on immigration reform. Securing the border is the first step for building public consensus for reform that recognizes the contributions of immigrants as well as respect for the immigration laws. But until we have far better security, the foundations for such reform are not yet in place.

The time for dramatic action is now. If we continue along the path we are on now, we remain highly vulnerable to terrorist infiltration. If we impose cumbersome, poorly conceived security procedures, we will inflict economic harm. Only a true transformation, with extensive strategic planning and major investments at our ports-of entry and in between them, will result in the border that will meet the demands of our times. Such a border could provide real security from the threats that face America and promote economic development in the United States and Mexico. This is the Southern Border to which we all aspire. It is my sincere hope that this report will contribute to making this aspiration a reality.

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